

CONFERENCE 2023

# Shaping the Future:

Key Themes in Higher Education

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## Trauma-Informed Practices in Post-Secondary Education and the Psychosocial Impact of Mindfulness in the Classroom

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# Agenda

- Defining Trauma
- Recognizing Trauma in Learners
- Providing a Safe Learning Environment
- The Importance of Regulation and Co-regulation
- Mindfulness Tools in the Classroom



# Check-in: Connecting to Mind, Heart, Body



# Trauma: Definition

- physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening
- has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning

(Desirae Zingarelli-Sweet)



## Acute trauma

- single-episode, unexpected event

## Continuous traumatic stress or historical/generational trauma

- ongoing, systematic, and/or cumulative group trauma

(Desirae Zingarelli-Sweet)

## Complex or developmental trauma

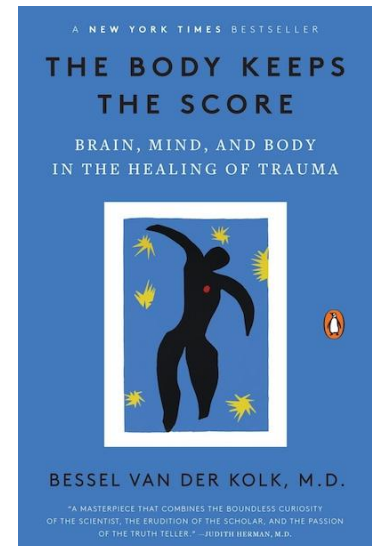
- sustained or repeated traumatic episodes



# Trauma and the Body

- Experience of losing control of one's body to the extent that ownership is called into question
- The body is abdicated entirely, ceases to be one's own. The body is not a safe place from which and within which to experience everyday life, let alone any semblance of joy or satisfaction.
- A big part of the healing process for trauma survivors is **reclaiming** one's body as one's own.

(Emerson,2009,p.3)



# Recognizing Trauma in Learners

- Find it hard to focus and think
- Have trouble retaining and recalling information
- Have difficulty taking risks:
  - responding to questions,
  - starting new tasks
  - considering alternative viewpoints



# Recognizing Trauma in Learners

- Become withdrawn and disengaged; fatigue
- Be irritable or have difficulty regulating their emotions; anxiety
- Struggle with attending class and completing assignments regularly and on time



# Providing a Safe Learning Environment



- No space will ever be as safe for everyone at the same time
- Become aware of the **power dynamic** in the class/oppression

Ex: "You are broken and need fixing. You don't know, I will impose my knowledge on you. You will do it my way."

# Providing a Safe Learning Environment

- Thinking something happened in the past and now everything will be better
- Healing happens through **relationships**



# Providing a Safe Learning Environment

- Sharing **authentic experiences** with your students
- Grounding and breathing together at the beginning of class
- Creating **predictability** and letting them know how class will be
  - Explaining the 'why', due dates, class routine, email response rate, publishing modules before class or a few days before, starting and ending class on time



# The Importance of Regulation and Co-regulation

- Students can see if we are **self-regulated** through our:
  - **Bodies, faces and voices**
- How do you **self-regulate** ?
  - Emotions, body, and mind
  - Sleep
  - exercise
  - setting healthy boundaries
  - taking breaks etc.

- **Co-regulation:**

- Thinking of **our relationship** to our students and their relationships **outside of the class**



# Anchors of Awareness

- Grounding, lengthening the breath
- Using the senses: turning head (using the eyes)
- Focus on center of body (hands to rest on body; release of oxytocin)



# Student Testimonial

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- "I decided to write you because although you probably don't know, you had an **important role in my life** this semester... I've been so **anxious** because **I'm struggling** to pay my bills, I really **miss my family**, friends and cats, and here in Canada, **I don't have many friends**. But in all of your classes, I would forget all of that. **I was truly able to feel present** (something that is so hard for people who have **severe anxiety**). You were always in a **good mood that was contagious to the students**, you respect other **cultures**. My **experience** in Alexander college **made sense** to me just because I was taking **French.**"

# Mindfulness Tools for the Classroom

- Morning check-in :Mind/Heart/Body
- Mindful Drawing/Meditation/Breathing
- Reflection Questions:
  - Remembering **why** you **are** in the **classroom** ?
  - **Who** helped and/or is helping you **be** in the classroom today?

# Mindfulness Tools for the Classroom

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- What is really **important** for **you** right **now**?
  - What do you **need** to **get there**?
- What's **one thing** you can **do for yourself** today to **improve your day**?
- At the end of the day, did it help your day? Should you try it again tomorrow or choose something else?

# Mindfulness Tools for the Classroom

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- Writing a **greeting card to a classmate** and **reading it** out loud to them
- Creating a **classroom contract together**:
  - What do you **need** from this **classroom space** to feel **supported in your learning**?
  - What are **your responsibilities/the instructor's responsibilities**?

# Mindfulness Tools for the Classroom

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- **Give yourself** what you want to **receive**:
  - **Appreciation**: What do you want to be appreciated for ?
  - **What can you do every day** that makes you feel appreciated ?
  - **Respect**: What do you want to be respected for?
  - What can you **do every day to respect yourself** ?

“ There is a **bond of trust** that must exist between the **student** and **teacher**.  
It is similar to a **rope between two mountain climbers**.  
The more the **teacher advances**, the more they can **help the student**.  
It is a bond that **lightens** and **strengthens**.  
It **does not weigh us down** and it **strengthens our sense of responsibility**.”

T.K.V Desikachar



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